

IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

PC disk optimizers fail to deliver value

Advertisements for disk optimizers claim to increase the efficiency of your personal computer. According to the ads, disk optimizers take the scattered segments of your disk files and rearrange them so that each file is continuous. This enables the magnetic head in the disk drive to move less so your programs run faster. All this sounds good in theory, but what about in practice?

I set out to find out and was absolutely amazed by the poor results. Not only were the programs that claimed to do optimizing terribly ineffective, but one of them created massive problems requiring hours to correct.

I tried out "Disk Optimizer," from SoftLogis Solutions of Manchester, N.H., \$54.95; and the condense function of "Mace+Utilities," from Paul Mace, Ashland, Ore., \$69.95. As you'll see, neither deserves a recommendation for this function alone, although I've previously spoken highly of the Mace+Utilities for some other functions.

In the case of Disk Optimizer, I was attracted by its appealing advertising in the computer trade press, and the indisputable logic of its promotional fliers. The company is not shy about its claims: without Disk Optimizer, "Everything takes longer because your disk has to work harder. 'How much faster will my system run?' ... In all cases, the system will run noticeably faster."

To test the program, I first ran a portion of Disk Optimizer that gives you the "optimization percentage" of any particular file. My test file was a data base with more than 9,000 name and address records. Before optimization, the program said the file had an optimization percentage of 62 percent, meaning that 62 percent of the disk sectors comprising the file were continuous. There seemed to be room for improvement. My benchmark time for a search of the data base was 6 minutes, 53 seconds.

After optimization, the program said the file had an optimization

percentage of 100 percent, but the search time was 6 minutes, 47 seconds — just 6 seconds faster.

On the positive side, the data base program appeared to load a little faster than before.

I then tried to load and run the program on another computer that



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contained another data base file, but for some reason — the importance of which I would not find out about until later — it would not run. It kept giving me error messages that were unintelligible. In despair, I gave up on Disk Optimizer and went on to test the condense function of Mace+Utilities.

After loading the Mace+Utilities and proceeding to run the condense function, the first indication of trouble came when it failed to finish the condense operation. My concern increased when I tried to reset the computer and it failed to boot. Instead of reinstalling the operating system, it did nothing. I was fully alarmed when Paul Mace, the author of the program, apologetically informed me over the phone that the only way to regain full use of my hard disk was to reformat and start over.

In other words, it bombed!

It was only after about four hours of phone calls and exhaustive work that I was up and running again.

The culprit was another program that was installed on the hard disk called SafetyNet, which interfered with the condense feature of Mace+Utilities. I suspect that's why Disk Optimizer would not run earlier — and if so, Disk Optimizer was helpful in not allowing itself to ruin my disk files.

The bottom line: Unless you're a masochist, there is little reason to use Disk Optimizer or the condense feature of Mace+Utilities. Without SafetyNet installed on your machine, they might run just fine. But other programs might be lurking on your disk to create similar problems. Until the authors can demonstrate that more performance improvements are possible with optimized files, why bother?

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